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ABSTRACT

This paper describes experiences of a reference librarian at California State University (Sacramento) who spent three weeks in Vladivostok (Russia) to assess the library and research needs of faculty and students at the Far Eastern State Technical University. After briefly describing the city of Vladivostok and its military role in the Soviet Union, the paper describes the three libraries visited: first, the main university library with its comprehensive research-level collection but lack of adequate operating funds; second, a small departmental library in world politics and law where faculty were most interested in learning to use the Internet; and, third, the Maxim Gorky municipal public library which maintains both an online catalog and a traditional card catalog and is actively participating in international book exchange and interlibrary loan programs. Overall, the lack of basic, reliable technology was seen to hamper all three libraries. (DB)

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The Coast of Siberia: A Vladivostok Spring

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The Coast of Siberia: A Vladivostok Spring

California State University, Sacramento (CSUS) has taken a leading role in establishing cooperative education programs in Russia. CSUS librarians are active participants in several of these projects, serving as mentors and providing library research tutorials for visiting Russian scholars.

Funding

With a grant from the U.S. Information Agency, CSUS initiated a collaborative project with the Far Eastern State Technical University (FESTU), Department of World Politics and Law, to develop Russia's first academic degree program in public administration. Located in the port city of Vladivostok, FESTU is renowned for its scientific and technical programs, particularly in the maritime fields. The social sciences, however, were undervalued during the former Soviet era. Consequently few teaching models exist in Russia today for such fields as business, law, and public policy. In Sacramento, visiting scholars from FESTU's public administration program can observe the State legislative process in action and learn new teaching techniques. The reciprocal agreement provides for CSUS faculty to visit FESTU as lecturers and consultants. In the spring of 1997 I accepted an invitation to spend three weeks in Vladivostok to assess the library and research needs of faculty and students.

Background

Vladivostok is a city of 650,000 situated on Russia's Pacific

coast overlooking the Sea of Japan. In addition to shipping, fishing, and manufacturing industries, Vladivostok is a cultural center of the Primorsky Region. The city boasts museums, galleries, libraries, and a new legitimate theater where British playwright Alan Ayckbourn attended the opening night performance of his comedy "Noises Off." (Pun was lost in the Russian translation: "Sounds From Behind the Curtain.") As the headquarters of the Russian Navy, Vladivostok's strategic importance kept it a closed city throughout the Soviet period -- so completely closed that it was off limits to other Russians who lived outside the area. I assumed that libraries in such a regulated environment would be organized to restrict rather than to facilitate access. Nothing in my pre-departure literature search indicated otherwise, albeit, most of the available information on Russian libraries has focused on the Moscow/St. Petersburg and western areas of the country. Vladivostok, at the edge of Russia's Far Eastern frontier, is separated from Moscow by 6,000 miles and nine time zones.

There was no need for open-access advocacy, however. Stacks were open; and from bibliographic instruction to user services, the three libraries I visited in Vladivostok were surprisingly similar to their American counterparts. I heard concerns that are familiar to librarians everywhere: budget difficulties, space problems, equipment needs, technology deficits. The only surplus amid all these shortages was in the area of human resources. Even in a labor-intensive environment of card catalog maintenance and manual indexing of journals - in Russia indexing and abstracting are not commercial enterprises - there was no backlog. This abundance of

personnel was not limited to libraries but was everywhere apparent. In museums, in restaurants, in train stations and in department stores there was a disproportionate number of employees to patrons. Work continued despite the fact that wages had been delayed for many months.

The masters degree in library science is not offered in Russia. All the librarians with whom I spoke in Vladivostok were highly qualified with at least one advanced degree.

Main University Library

FESTU's 8,000 students and 800+ faculty are well served by the University Library's comprehensive, research-level collection that includes the most complete holdings of technical books in the Far East. Materials are organized by one of the two nationally standardized cataloging systems and shelved in open stacks. Each year the University Library lends more than one million books and journals. Before Perestroika the University Library was adding 50,000 new books each year. By 1997 only 11,000 volumes were added annually, including donations and textbooks. Russian academic libraries provide all required textbooks so students do not have to buy them.

A paralyzing lack of funds affected the University Library on many levels. Shelves were completely full and overflowed onto the floor. Yet a new multi-story library building remained empty for more than a year after completion because there were no funds for shelves and moving. Automation seems unlikely to occur this century; but the dire immediate need, according to the Associate Director, is for photocopiers.

My formal meeting with the University Library's eighty staff and administrators concluded with questions for me. In addition to queries about my library, they wanted to know how much I am paid, whether I belong to a union, and what benefits I receive. They were eager to tell me about their benefits. As union members they are entitled to 31 vacation days annually, four months paid sick leave, and three years paid maternity leave, the first seven months on full salary followed by a stipend that decreases each year until it is phased out when the child is 18. There was no mention of the wage delays that continue to be pervasive throughout Russia.

Departmental Library, World Politics and Law

The small departmental library has 28 journal titles and 500 volumes. Half are English language books purchased in Sacramento with grant funds to support the new public administration program. To supplement the departmental holdings, upon my return to Sacramento I set up procedures for shipping de-selected gift books from CSUS to FESTU. Well over 100 carefully chosen volumes were sent during the past year. Books on resume writing and interview skills have been well received, as the job search is not yet a familiar process in Russia. During the Soviet era students were educated or trained for specific jobs according to the needs of the prevailing Five Year Plan.

The faculty of World Politics and Law expressed great interest in learning to use the Internet and requested that I present an Internet workshop. Complicated preparations were necessary. An appointment with the University president was required to get his permission to use the Internet computer. Just as all arrangements

were completed an extended power outage occurred that lasted throughout the remainder of my visit. My impromptu workshop became a low-tech lecture. The demonstration and hands-on practice were postponed until the FESTU faculty next visited CSUS in March 1998. Lesson: Be prepared with alternative teaching methods/materials.

Maxim Gorky Municipal Public Library

FESTU is fortunate in its location near the city center, a short bus ride to the magnificent, historic Gorky Municipal Public Library. On the day of my visit, students quietly absorbed in homework filled its spacious reading room. This research library's collection is a rich resource for the city and for FESTU. The Gorky serves 30,000 users per year and circulates 780,000 books annually. These numbers do not include children's books; special libraries for children are funded by a separate state agency. The Gorky is funded mainly through the (national)Russian Ministry of Culture. Service has a high priority at the Gorky. Librarians provide research support for agencies and businesses free of charge and publish a monthly newsletter as well as bibliographies and user guides. Library meeting rooms are available free to community groups.

A public online catalog contains MARC-format records with access via 486-level PCs, in addition to the traditional card catalog. Two parallel catalog systems are maintained because, the library director told me, "Librarians distrust computers." Nevertheless, the Gorky has made significant progress toward full automation and is clearly more technologically advanced than the FESTU library.

Before Perestroika Russian libraries had limited contacts with foreign libraries. In recent years international cooperation has greatly increased. The Gorky's Automation Department interacts with libraries worldwide via FAX and electronic mail, and participates in the International Book Exchange and interlibrary loan. The Gorky has exchange agreements with several American libraries including a program that provides for librarians to receive training at the University of Hawaii's library. Vladivostok is a closed city no longer. FESTU has also established several collaborations with universities in "Pacific countries" including San Diego State University and Washington State University, as well as institutions in Australia, Japan, Great Britain, and China.

Conclusion

Throughout my visit I was treated as an honored guest, invited to frequent parties and banquets, and escorted about the city. Having no Russian language skills, I was provided with a translator, a first year FESTU student in the public policy program who had recently spent an exchange year in Chicago. He was proud of his fashionable, American wardrobe and his command of American colloquialisms. After I gently corrected his pronunciation of "Peace Corpse," he often asked me to check his usage or to define unfamiliar words: schmoozing, upscale, jet-setter. The few English speakers I met were eager to chat with me, for most had never before encountered a "native" English speaker. I received several compliments on my "beautiful American accent." Their English locution was formal and grammatically perfect, uncontaminated by the jargon and verbal tics that often

clutter American conversation.

Faculty and students at FESTU have a variety of traditional library research options: the departmental library, the university library, and the Gorky Municipal Public Library. But at the time of my visit, the lack of basic, reliable technology was a significant disadvantage. FESTU had only sporadic access to the Internet through two computers inexplicably located in a building that experienced the most frequent and prolonged power outages. Infrastructure problems, power failures, and wage delays are more acute in Vladivostok than in other parts of Russia due at least in part to a political feud between President Yeltsin and the "rebellious" Primorsky Regional governor (*New York Times, Sacramento Bee*, June 11, 1997).

Electronic mail, letters, conversations with visiting FESTU scholars, and the online **Vladivostok News** keep me in touch with Vladivostok where daily life continues to be filled with deprivations and inconveniences. Power outages remain a persistent problem, as is the frequent lack of running water, both hot and cold. Nevertheless, FESTU has made important and encouraging advances in the past two years. Recently, the Department of World Politics and Law was officially designated "The Pacific Institute of World Politics and Law" in a televised ceremony in Vladivostok attended by local and foreign dignitaries. A new major has been added and enrollment at the Institute has increased by almost 30% to 300. Not only is the new library building now occupied, it has Internet workstations and the campus communication systems have been upgraded. FESTU's scientists and researchers, previously

impeded by deteriorating infrastructure and geographic isolation from the technological progress accruing in Russia's western cities, can now begin to participate more fully in the international scholarly dialogue, to their benefit and to ours. Students in the public policy program that CSUS helped to create may graduate to become the Institute's faculty of tomorrow.

For more information on Russian libraries' automation and training librarians see:

Shraiberg, Yakov L. Project Russian OCLC: Global Information Infrastructure. **Microcomputers for Information Management: Global Internetworking for Libraries**, 12(4):279-296, 1995.

Titarenko, Evgeny, et al. Training Librarians at the Kemerovo Institute of Culture. **International Library Education**, 37:67-71, Winter 1996.